DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 532 CS 007 133

AUTHOR Cooper, J. David
TITLE Teaching Reading Comprehension: A Practical Approach.
INSTITUTION Ball State Univ., Muncie, Ind. Teachers Coll.
PUB DATE [82]
NOTE 28p.; Courtesy of Houghton Mifflin Company.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Concept Formation; Elementary Secondary Education; Learning Theories; Listening Skills; Questioning Techniques; *Reading Comprehension; *Reading Instruction; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS PF Project

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present classroom teachers with a succinct, practical explanation of how to teach reading comprehension. An approach to the systematic teaching of comprehension which is based on practical interpretation of current research and theory is presented. Examples are given that will assist any teacher who is responsible for comprehension instruction in carrying out that task. Twelve references conclude the document. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED236532

TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

A Practical Approach

courtesy of

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

J. David Cooper
Professor of Education
Teachers College
Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

CS007133

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. David Cooper

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

For many years reading educators thought reading comprehension was something that could not be systematically taught (8). It was assumed that the best way to develop comprehension was by asking students a variety of types of questions before, during and after the time stories had been read. While asking different types of questions is important, it is NOT TEACHING COMPREHENSION. Questioning is a way of checking comprehension or a means of guiding a student's thinking as he/she develops an understanding of the process used in comprehending. BUT simply asking students different types of questions after stories have been read does not TEACH reading comprehension (2).

The purpose of this paper is to present classroom teachers with a succinct, practical explanation of HOW TO TEACH reading comprehension. All of the questions related to the comprehension process and comprehension theories are not addressed. Instead an approach to the systematic teaching of comprehension which is based on practical interpretation of current research and theory is presented. Examples are given that will assist any teacher who is responsible for comprehension instruction in carrying out that task.

COMPREHENSION DEFINED

What is reading comprehension? By definition, it is simply "understanding what is read" (4). This is a basic definition for the outcome of a very complex process. Reading experts have long been able to define the term in relation to its outcome. However, they have not been able to explain the process through which the reader goes to accomplish this outcome. Currently, educators understand reading comprehension better than ever, but there are still

many mysteries and unanswered questions about how this process really works. Based on the interpretation of current research and theory it can be concluded that reading comprehension involves an active process on the part of the reader where he or she interacts with the text being read. The teaching of reading comprehension must then help the reader develop the ability to use this process.

FACTORS INFLUENCING COMPREHENSION

There are two major categories of factors which influence reading comprehension, those which occur within the reader and those which occur within the text. Any systematic approach to the teaching of comprehension must account for these factors.

Within the Reader

Within the reader there are four specific factors which influence comprehension ability. These include:

1. Language Ability
2. Background of Experience
3. Interest and Motivation
4. Decoding Ability

Reading is based on language ability. This assumption is well supported by research and theory (1,3,6,8,9,10,11). A reader's ability to comprehend is strongly influenced by and based on his or her ability to use all aspects of oral language.

Background of experience is crucial to reading comprehension. Basically comprehension can be thought of from the point of view of the reader relating new information to what he or she already knows. If the reader does not have the background for the material being read, then he or she will not be able to comprehend it effectively.

The reader's interest in and motivation for reading about a given topic also influence how well the reader will be able to comprehend the topic. It is often difficult to separate the reader's background experience from his or her interest and motivation.

The final factor within the reader which influences comprehension ability is decoding. An effective comprehender needs skill in associating sounds with printed symbols and in decoding words. While decoding influences comprehension, the reverse is also true. Comprehension also influences decoding.

Within the Text

The second category of factors which influences how a reader comprehends takes place in terms of the material that is to be read and how it is constructed. These factors include the:

1. Vocabulary load
2. Concept load
3. Structure

Vocabulary accounts for a large portion of a reader's ability to comprehend. Therefore the vocabulary used by an author must be understood by the reader if effective comprehension is to take place.

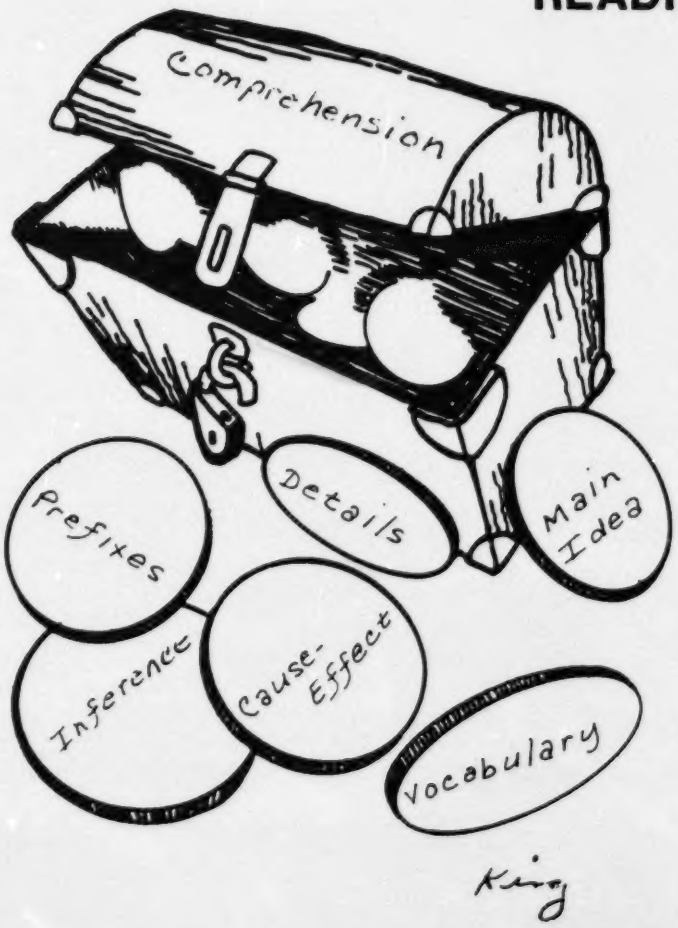
The number of concepts introduced by an author also influences the reader's comprehension. The greater the number of concepts the more difficult the material.

The final factor within the text which influences the reader's comprehension is the overall structure or writing style of the material. The complexity of the sentences,

the way in which the sentences are put together, and the overall organizational structure of the text influence a reader's ability to comprehend.

All of these factors WITHIN THE READER and WITHIN THE TEXT must be considered in developing A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION.

WHAT DO I TEACH WHEN I TEACH READING COMPREHENSION ?

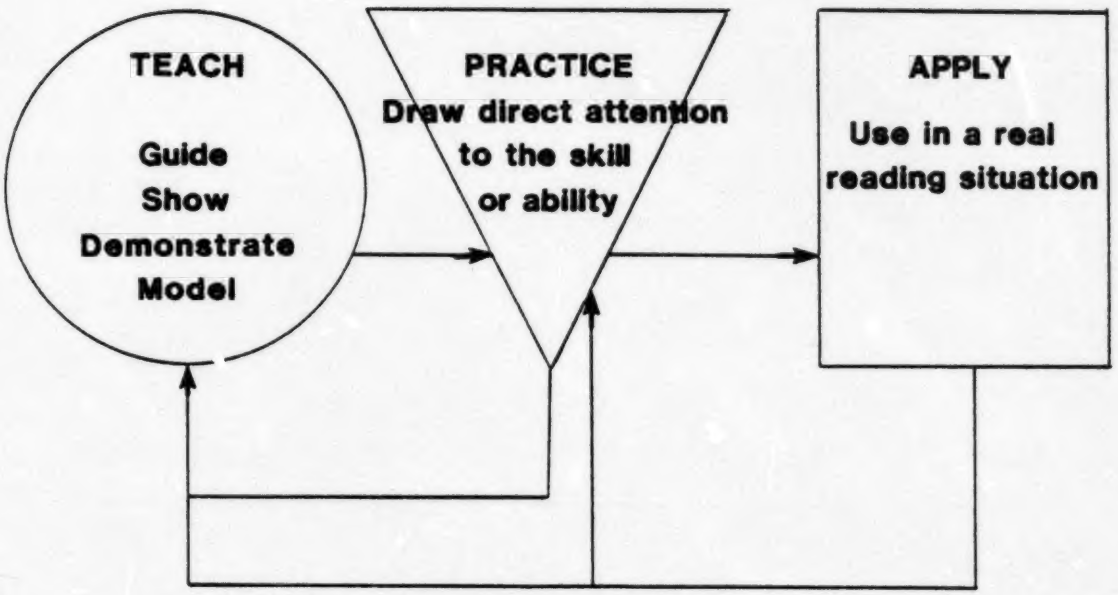


Reading comprehension is an active process by which the reader gets meaning from what is read. The question then arises, SPECIFICALLY, WHAT DO I TEACH WHEN I TEACH READING COMPREHENSION? The purpose here is not to answer this question but simply to say that it is important for the teacher to know exactly what abilities are to be developed in comprehension.

Certainly, reading teachers have progressed far from the point of thinking that comprehension instruction should focus only on a group of isolated skills. We now better understand the larger, overriding abilities of comprehension. Several references found at the end of this monograph offer a thorough discussion of those abilities (1, 6, 7, 8).

AN INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

The development of any skill or ability must involve three distinct types of activity before a learner can achieve mastery (1). These three activities are depicted in the diagram of the instructional model on page 8. As the diagram indicates, some learners will require reteaching and repracticing several times before they are able to apply what is being taught. PRACTICE activities draw direct attention to a skill or ability with fill in the blank, matching, multiple choice, or other such exercises. APPLY activities provide the reader opportunities to use the skill or ability in a "real reading" situation. The bulk of application in reading instruction occurs during some

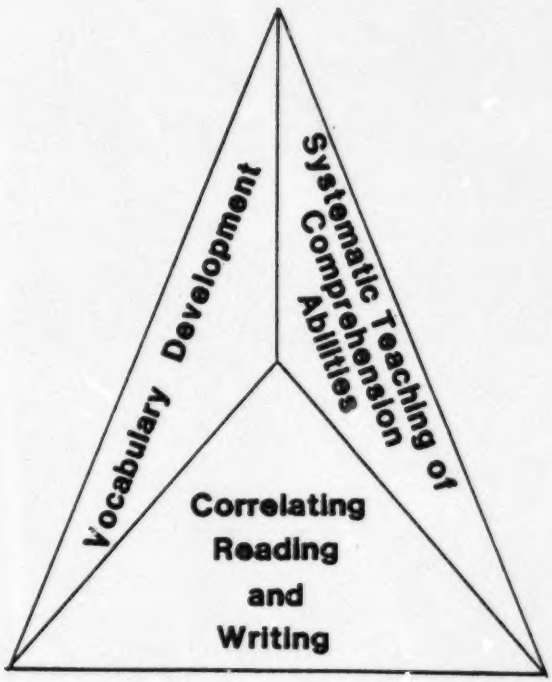


type of guided silent reading. The questions used by the teacher during this time will indicate whether or not a student is applying a particular skill or ability.

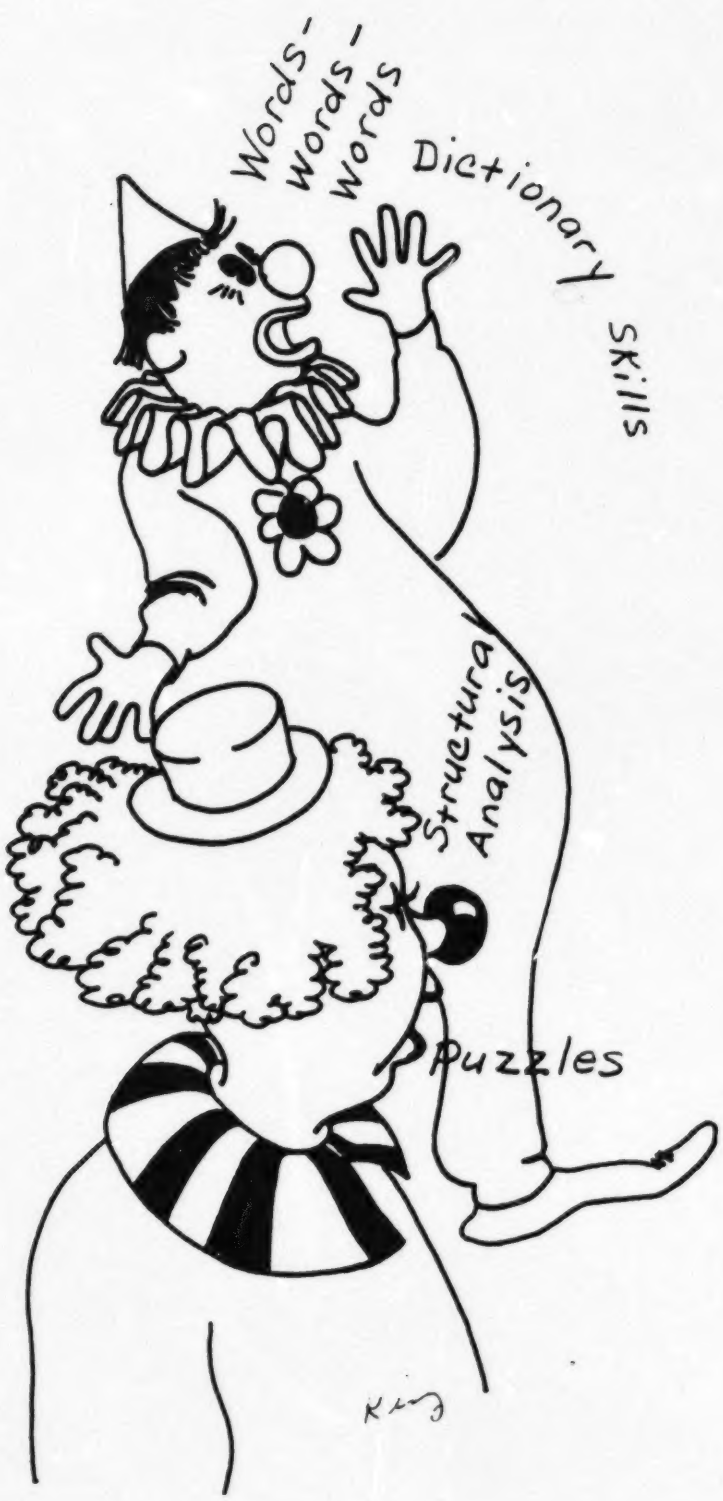
DIMENSIONS OF COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION

Comprehension instruction involves three specific dimensions. These are:

1. Vocabulary Development
2. Correlating Reading and Writing
3. Systematic Teaching of Comprehension Abilities



Based on conclusions from current research all of these elements need to be included in any instructional program for reading comprehension (3, 5, 8, 12). While they are not all components which contribute equally to a student's comprehension ability, they should be present in some form.



Vocabulary Development

The meanings of words account for a significant portion of a reader's comprehension ability. Therefore, vocabulary needs to be taught systematically and developed throughout the reading program. This must include structured opportunities for students to learn word meanings in various contexts as well as to learn those skill components which will help them derive word meanings. Such activities should include:

- Teaching Structural Analysis
- Teaching Dictionary Skills
- Teaching Context Clues
- Preteaching Vocabulary in Written Context Before Stories and Content Materials are Read

- Focusing on Words for a Given Topic:
  - T.V. Words
  - Words for Eating
  - Laughing Words
  - Fun Words
  - Sad Words
  - Words that Make You Think
- Labeling Activities
- Classification Activities
- Word Puzzles and Crossword Puzzles

Correlating Reading and Writing

A second dimension of the instructional program for reading comprehension is incorporating writing activities with reading. While the exact nature of the relationship between reading and writing is not known, research indicates that correlating reading and writing helps improve a student's comprehension ability (3, 12). Therefore, the instructional program for reading comprehension should include many opportunities for students to write in relation to stories they are reading. Activities might include writing:

- Journals or Diaries
- Plays and Stories
- Poetry
- Historical News Reports
- Class or School Newspapers
- Photo or Illustration Captions
- Stories generated from 2 or 3 Basic Sentences taken from a Selection

Ted is coming home.
Ted is bringing a friend with him.

1. Ted is coming home and bringing a friend with him.
2. Ted and his friend are coming home.

Having students learn to take simple sentences and combine them in various ways also influences comprehension (12). By writing the combinations and discussing any changes in meaning students may improve their comprehension. For example.

A. Bob likes apples.

B. Mary eats tons of popcorn.

Some Possible Combinations

1. Bob likes apples, and Mary eats tons of popcorn.
2. Bob and Mary like to eat. He eats apples and she eats tons of popcorn.
3. Bob likes apples but Mary eats tons of popcorn.

Systematic Teaching of Comprehension Abilities

The final dimension of reading comprehension instruction is the SYSTEMATIC TEACHING OF COMPREHENSION ABILITIES. All readers must be systematically taught how to employ the processes needed to become effective comprehenders. The remaining portion of this paper will focus on how this

should be done and will illustrate each of the steps to be followed.

STEPS FOR THE SYSTEMATIC TEACHING OF COMPREHENSION ABILITIES

It has already been emphasized that comprehension should be systematically taught as a part of the reading program. The steps outlined and explained in this section are designed to present a basic pattern for teaching reading comprehension. The basic steps can be generalized to any of the comprehension skills or abilities.

The process of reading comprehension is highly dependent on much more than the recognition of printed words. Oral language development and experiential background are both very important. The foundation for any comprehension skill is the learner's ability to use that skill in oral language before being expected to use the skill in reading. These factors form the basis for the sequence to be used in teaching comprehension skills.

Selecting Materials to Use in Teaching

Before the actual teaching of a comprehension skill begins, two factors should be considered:

1. Try to select material that is already within the student's experiential background. By doing this the teacher does not have to be as concerned about building the background before teaching. The only concern will be the new skill to be taught.

2. Select materials that the student can read. For students who are having difficulty learning to read, select materials at their independent level. For those who are progressing as would be expected, use materials which are at their instructional level.

Steps in Teaching

Teaching reading comprehension is a three step process (1). These three steps should be completed at the learner's independent or instructional reading level. The teaching of comprehension, like the teaching of other reading skills, takes place in the Skill Building Phase of the Directed Reading Lesson (DRL), and utilizes the elements of the Instructional Model. A skill building section can be found in all basal reading programs. The three teaching steps for systematically teaching reading comprehension are:

Step 1. Develop the Concept of the Skill

Step 2. Use the Skill at the Listening Level

Step 3. Demonstrate the Skill at the Reading Level

Step 1. Develop the Concept of the Skill

This step requires the teacher to explain the skill and relate the use of the skill to something the student already understands. The teacher should check the students' background of knowledge related to the skill to be taught. It is necessary to begin teaching something new by building on what the student already knows. This is accomplished orally in a questioning, discussing atmosphere or by using concrete materials to illustrate the concept of the skill. The concept of the skill being taught is explained and developed. It is not necessary to use the actual skill term with students, i.e. inference, cause-effect, main idea, etc....

Step 2. Use the Skill at the Listening Level

The second step of teaching comprehension involves having the student use the skill at the listening level. The teacher reads to the students and guides them to listen for a specific purpose. The students have to listen to what is being told or read to them and carry out the purpose. The material being presented to the students

should be based on their experiences and not be difficult to understand. When students give their responses to the listening activity, the teacher must help them see why their answers are right or wrong. This is done through positive, constructive discussion. Understanding why an answer is incorrect is as important as understanding why one is correct.

Step 3. Demonstrate the Skill at the Reading Level

Step three for teaching comprehension requires the student to read and utilize the skill that is being taught. In this phase, the teacher is concerned about demonstrating to the students or modeling the use of the skill. The material to be read should pose no decoding problems for the student. The skill being taught should be the only thing new in the lesson. The students' reading is directed by the teacher. The materials given to the students to be read may be a group of sentences or a short paragraph. The teacher demonstrates to the students the skill being taught by asking purpose questions and then showing students how to read and determine the answer. The type of question asked reflects the skill being taught. Showing students how to use the skill will take the form of underlining, circling, or marking material that will help the student answer the purpose question.

Included with the visual illustration of how to determine the answer, there should be oral discussion which will help students see the rationale for the answer reached. The key feature in this step is the demonstrating or modeling of the skill. If the teacher just has students read and answer purpose questions, no teaching is done. THE ACTIVITY THEN BECOMES PRACTICE OR APPLY!

Anytime a NEW comprehension skill is TAUGHT at any level, primary, intermediate, or advanced, ALL THREE STEPS should be INCLUDED. One step might be given more emphasis than another; the decision to do this would be based on student background and ability. If students have difficulty in performing the task or understanding any one of the three levels, work at that level should be repeated before moving to the next level. IN THIS WAY STUDENTS ARE SYSTEMATICALLY TAUGHT THE PROCESSES TO BE USED IN READING COMPREHENSION.

SAMPLE SCRIPTS FOR TEACHING COMPREHENSION

The following scripts are presented to illustrate the steps for SYSTEMATICALLY TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION.

The steps for teaching comprehension have been incorporated into the instructional model. One script is oriented to the primary level and the other to the intermediate. The scripts include sample dialogue and materials. What the teacher is to say is printed in CAPITAL LETTERS.

Skill: Noting Details

Materials: A picture of a scene that is not too complicated.

Chalkboard or overhead

TEACH

Concept Level

Say: SOMETIMES IT'S HARD TO REMEMBER EVERYTHING YOU SEE IN A PICTURE OR EVERYTHING SOMEONE TELLS YOU OR EVERYTHING YOU READ. TODAY WE ARE GOING TO LEARN TO LOOK, TO LISTEN, AND TO READ CAREFULLY SO THAT WE WILL REMEMBER EVERYTHING.

Show the group the picture and then say: TELL ME WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THIS PICTURE.

Get the students to tell you what is happening. (The bears are having a picnic.) Proceed by asking the group questions to elicit specific details about the picture. Ask such questions as:

- HOW MANY BEARS ARE HAVING A PICNIC? (Two)
- WHAT DID THE BEARS KEEP THEIR FOOD IN? (A basket)
- WHAT OTHER THINGS DO YOU SEE IN THE PICTURE? (Trees and birds)

Depending on the detail of the picture and level of the students you should proceed with this type of discussion until you feel students are able to note the important details in the picture.

Conclude by saying: WHEN YOU FIRST LOOK AT SOMETHING YOU SEE GENERALLY WHAT IS HAPPENING. THE MORE CAREFULLY YOU LOOK THE MORE THINGS YOU WILL SEE. THIS IS ALSO TRUE WHEN WE LISTEN TO PEOPLE TALK AND WHEN WE READ SOMETHING.

Listening Level

Say: NOW I WANT YOU TO LISTEN TO THE FOLLOWING STORY TO TELL ME TWO THINGS THAT MARK DID. LISTEN CAREFULLY.

Read the following story to the group.

MARK LIKED TO PLAY AFTER SCHOOL. TODAY HE WAS PLAYING WITH HIS RED WAGON. HE WAS PUTTING HIS LITTLE DOG, SAM, IN THE WAGON AND TAKING HIM FOR A RIDE. MARK AND SAM ALSO PLAYED BALL. THEY WERE HAVING FUN!

Say: TELL ME TWO THINGS THAT MARK DID.

Continue by discussing the story with the group. Ask other detail questions such as:

- WHAT SIZE DOG WAS SAM?
- WHAT DID MARK LIKE TO DO AFTER SCHOOL?

Reread the story to the group if necessary. Conclude the discussion by saying: AS WE LISTEN WE HAVE TO PAY ATTENTION TO PICK OUT THE IMPORTANT DETAILS WE HEAR.

Reading Level

Print the following story on the chalkboard or on the overhead projector.

The old man was walking in the woods. He saw a big brown bear. The bear looked very mad. It ran after the old man. The old man had no one to help him. But then the bear found some food and stopped to eat. The old man was safe.

Say: READ THIS STORY SILENTLY TO TELL THREE THINGS ABOUT THE BEAR.

After students have read the story have them tell about the bear. As they tell each detail have them underline the part of the story that proves their answer. If students are unable to give three details proceed with the following type of questions one at a time and have them locate each answer. Underline or circle the part of the story which proves their answers.

- WHAT COLOR WAS THE BEAR?
- HOW DID THE BEAR LOOK?
- WHAT DID THE BEAR FIND?
- WHAT DID THE BEAR DO TO THE OLD MAN?

If students give incorrect answers help them see why their answer is not right. Do not just tell them they are wrong.

PRACTICE

Use an exercise from any available source which requires students to read short passages and answer multiple choice, detail questions.

Example

We can play ball here.
We will have fun.
The ball is big.
We will throw it.

We can play _____.

fun big ball

APPLY

Select a story at the students' instructional level. Use Guided Silent Reading and follow-up discussion to see if students can apply the skill of noting details. Do this by asking one detail question at a time as purpose setting questions. Have students read, locate the answer, and read orally to prove their choice. If they are incorrect, help them see why.

After the Guided Silent Reading discuss the story asking other detail questions. Allow students to use their books and look back because this is not remembering details.

Skill: Predicting Outcomes

Materials: A Stack of 5 or 6 books

Chalkboard or overhead projector

TEACH

Concept Level

Say: HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ABLE TO GUESS THAT SOMETHING WAS GOING TO HAPPEN BEFORE IT DID? (Give students time to answer) AS I STACK THESE BOOKS CLOSE TO THE EDGE OF THIS DESK CAN YOU TELL WHAT IS LIKELY TO HAPPEN? (Stack books close to the edge of the desk so that they might fall; accept any reasonable answers. Help students see that there might be several possible choices but they can't be absolutely sure which is correct.

Conclude by saying: WHEN WE LOOK AT CERTAIN FACTS, WE CAN SOMETIMES TELL WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN NEXT.

Listening Level

Print the following statements on the chalkboard or on the overhead projector.

1. Mr. Johns was going to buy new tires for his car.

2. Mr. Johns was going to patch his tires.

3. Mr. Johns was going to have a blowout.

4. The car will slow down when the temperature cools off.

Say: I AM GOING TO READ YOU A STORY. AS I READ I WANT YOU TO LOOK AT THESE FOUR SENTENCES AND PICK OUT THE ONE WHICH TELLS WHAT IS LIKELY TO HAPPEN. LISTEN AND FOLLOW ALONG AS I READ THESE SENTENCES TO YOU. (Read the sentences to the group) NOW LISTEN TO THE STORY TO PICK OUT THE SENTENCE THAT IS LIKELY TO HAPPEN.

MR. JOHNS WAS DRIVING HIS CAR VERY FAST. THE TEMPERATURE OUTSIDE WAS 100°. INSIDE THE FAST MOVING CAR, HE COULD SMELL THE BURNING RUBBER OF THE TIRES. SUDDENLY, HE COULD HEAR A THUMPING NOISE IN THE WHEELS. HE TRIED TO STOP BUT HE KNEW IT WAS TOO LATE.

After reading the story aloud to the group, discuss their answers. Help them see why one answer is more logical than the others. Also, ask the group for other logical possibilities.

Conclude by saying: YOU CAN SOMETIMES TELL WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN WHEN YOU LISTEN TO ALL THE FACTS. THIS WILL HELP YOU AS YOU LEARN MORE ABOUT READING.

Reading Level

Print the following story on the chalkboard or overhead projector.

The Central High School basketball team was ready for the big game. They had not won for three months. Their best player had recovered from his injuries. Now they were excited because they knew they would have a chance again.

The day before the game, the coach learned that the other team had problems. Two of their best players were unable to play because of low grades. This increased Central's excitement but they knew they still had a challenge.

Say: READ THIS STORY TO YOURSELF TO TELL WHAT YOU THINK IS GOING TO HAPPEN.

After the story has been read, list the predictions of the group on the board. Have students go back and find places in the story that will prove that they might be correct. Have them underline and/or read aloud these places.

Talk through the choices and help students see which ones are most logical. For totally illogical answers, positively guide students to see why a particular choice would not be a good one.

PRACTICE

Give students multiple-choice exercise from a workbook or other source for practicing predicting outcomes.

APPLY

Select a story at the students' instructional reading level. Use Guided Silent Reading

and follow-up discussion to see if students can apply the skill of predicting outcomes.

Divide the story into appropriate parts. Have the students read the first part to predict what might happen. Discuss their answers and have them justify choices by rereading places aloud to prove their points. Have the students continue reading the next part to see if their prediction was correct and tell what will happen next. Continue in this manner until the story has been completed.

REFERENCES

1. Cooper, J. David et. al. THE WHAT AND HOW OF READING INSTRUCTION, Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1979.

2. Durkin, Dolores. "What Classroom Observations Reveal About Comprehension Instruction," READING RESEARCH QUARTERLY, XIV, No. 4, (1978-79), 481-533.

3. Hammill, Donald and Gaye McNutt. "Language Abilities and Reading: A Review of the Literature on Their Relationship," ELEMENTARY SCHOOL JOURNAL, Vol. 80, #5, 1980, pp. 269-277.

4. Harris, Theodore L. and Richard E. Hodges, Co-editors. A DICTIONARY OF READING AND RELATED TERMS, Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1981.

5. Johnson, Dale D. and P. David Pearson. TEACHING READING VOCABULARY, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

6. Lapp, Diane and James Flood. TEACHING READING TO EVERY CHILD, New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978.

7. May, Frank B. READING AS COMMUNICATION, Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1982.

8. Pearson, P. David and Dale D. Johnson. TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

9. Pennock, Clifford, editor. READING COMPREHENSION AT FOUR LINGUISTIC LEVELS, Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1979.

10. Smith, Frank. UNDERSTANDING READING, Third Edition, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982.

11. Spiro, J. Rand et. al., editors. THEORETICAL ISSUES IN READING COMPREHENSION, Hillsdale, N. J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1980.

12. Straw, Stanley B. and Robert Schreiner. "The Effect of Sentence Manipulation on Subsequent Measures of Reading and Listening Comprehension," READING RESEARCH QUARTERLY, XVII, No. 3, 1982, 339-352.

HM